

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

REPORT 14-2005

Minutes of a meeting of the Community Services Committee held in Committee Room 4, Regional Municipal Building, Thorold, Ontario, on September 12, 2005, commencing at 3:10 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Committee: Councillors Hildreth, Chair; Partington, Regional Chair; Almas; Bailey; Baty; Casselman; Marshall; Mastroianni.

Staff: Mr. Trojan, Chief Administrative Officer; Mr. Hutchings, Commissioner, Community Services; Ms. Reilly, Legislative Assistant.

Staff

Part-time: Mr. Diakow, Acting Commissioner, Corporate Services Department; Ms. Hepplewhite, Corporate Records Manager; Mr. Lockyer, Treasurer/Director Financial Management & Planning; Mr. McKay, Cost Analyst; Ms. Murphy, Manager, Current and Capital Budgets; Ms. Stewart, Manager, Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities; Mr. Ventresca, Director, Seniors Services.

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Presentation – Multi Year Financial Plan

137. Multi Year Financial Plan – Linking Strategy to Action

Mr. Lockyer, Treasurer/Director of Financial Management & Planning, introduced the objectives of the Multi Year Financial Plan and provided background information for upcoming budget deliberations. The Treasurer highlighted the timetable, the concept and benefits of the Multi Year Financial Plan and its benefits. Mr. Lockyer outlined the Council Goals and Objectives as follows and presented a brief description of each:

- Optimal Access to Niagara
- Balanced, Planned Land Use
- Environmental Stewardship
- Affordable Service Excellence and Satisfying Work
- Healthy, Safe and Productive Communities
- Sustainable Economic Development

A chart detailing the impact on the tax levy of the Multi Year Plan Base and new initiatives was presented. The summary indicated that the two Council Goals; Optimal Access and Healthy/Safe and Productive Communities had the largest impact on the 2006 tax levy at 2.54% (\$6.4 million) and 1.58% (\$4.0 million) respectively. The predominant challenge created by Optimal Access is "Roads" and is primarily due to debt charges. The second most significant challenge is Healthy, Safe and Productive Community, primarily due to ODSP caseload increase and further development of emergency services.

The analysis excludes Non Tax Revenues, Police and Assessment Growth and does not reflect budget preparation work currently underway.

138. Community Services Department – Multi Year Financial Plan

Mr. Hutchings, Commissioner, Community Services Department, highlighted Goal 5, Healthy, Safe and Productive Communities and its objectives as having the largest impact on their department's budget with a total of \$56,655,695 for 2005 budget; \$60,859,543 for the 2006 Multi Year; and \$63,933,163 for the 2007 Multi Year. This impact is due to increases in the O.D.S.P. and Social Assistance Programs.

Mr. Hutchings presented a breakdown of financial plan assumptions as follows:

- Salary and benefits to increase by identified percentages
- Goods and services to increase 2% per year

Seniors Services

- Resident revenue increased 1% per year
- Provincial subsidy to increase 3.5% per year

Children's Services

- Best Start funding to increase 13%, with Regional 20% contribution
- Staffing increases with administration

Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities

- 1% increase for income support allowances
- 2% for mandatory and discretionary benefits
- 4% in discretionary benefits for ODSP
- 4% increase for ODSP allowances
- 4% increase in ODSP drug and dental benefits for 2006
- 4% increase in all other related benefits for ODSP clients

Current Key Considerations of the Multi Year Financial Plan were presented as follows:

Senior Services

- Provincial Funding of Long Term Care
 - Increase in provincial funding amounts to 1.5% over the previous year's provincial base funding. Preliminary projected inflationary increases for 2006 are approximately 3%.

Children's Services

- New 100% provincial funding for the "Best Start" program will require and increase in full time equivalent staffing and provide opportunity for modest reductions in municipal contributions over the next three years.

Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities

- Provincially Operated Programs
 - Rising ODSP costs both in caseload including 3.8% increase in caseload and a 7% increase in allowances.
- Employment Assistance Funding
 - Anticipated caseload increase 2006 & 2007.
 - Employment preparation funding will increase due to multiple client interventions to allow exits from the system.
 - Employment Assistance Funding capped (based on 2003 funding levels).

Mr. Hutchings highlighted the following cost considerations:

- Seniors Services will face a shortfall of \$840,000.
- Children's Services – No new municipal contributions in 2006 required.
- The ODSP costs increasing \$2.1 million net in 2006.
- SA&EO provincial employment assistance budget capped at \$6.1 million (2003 rates).

The Commissioner outlined the following strategies to mitigate the impact on the Financial Plan/Budget:

- Advocate for province to increase long term care funding to bring provincial contribution up to an inflationary rate.
- Identify possible cost reduction strategies.
- Leverage new provincial "Best Start" dollars to reduce municipal contributions.
- Consider use of child care reserves (approximately \$400,000) to offset anticipated increased child care requirements for clients on social assistance.
- Explore direct operation of ODSP.

- Advocate for provincial government for change in funding formula for ODSP.
- Investigate delivery of ODSP program through Federal government.
- Optimize employment levels to find different ways to derive funding.

139. Multi Year Financial Plan 2004-2007

Moved by Councillor Bailey
Seconded by Councillor Marshall

That Report CSD 77-2005, June 1, 2005, respecting Multi Year Financial Plan 2004-2007, be received.

Carried.

140. Rent Tables for Social Assistance Recipients, Rent Geared to Income (RGI) Calculation and the Impact on Regional Budgets

Mr. McKay, Cost Analyst, provided an overview of the financial impact of a recommended policy change on Niagara Region Programs for current shelter rates for families living in social housing, who are in receipt of Ontario Works. It is estimated that this change in policy could result in a savings of approximately \$6.3 million annually.

Councillor Hildreth, Committee Chair and members of Council commended Mr. McKay for his comprehensive report and his leadership in moving forward with this initiative.

Moved by Councillor Mastroianni
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That Report COM 73-2005, September 12, 2005, respecting Rent Tables for Social Assistance Recipients, Rent Geared to Income (RGI) Calculation and the Impact on Regional Budgets, be received for information.

That the Regional Chairman be authorized to correspond with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Honourable John Gerretsen in support of this policy change.

That the Regional Chairman be authorized to correspond with the Minister of Community and Social Services, Honourable Sandra Pupatello in support of this policy change; and

That the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) be provided with copies of the Regional Chairman's letters and this report for further advocacy actions.

Carried.

141. 2005 Mid-Year Report: January to June 2005
Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities

Ms. Stewart, Manager, Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities, provided an overview of key program and financial information pertaining to Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities for the period of January 1 to June 30, 2005.

Moved by Councillor Baty
Seconded by Councillor Casselman

That Report COM 74-2005, September 12, 2005, respecting 2005 Mid-Year Report: January to June 2005 Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, be received for information.

Carried.

142. Use of Resident Interest Trust Fund
for Staff Education Initiatives

Moved by Councillor Bailey
Seconded by Regional Chair Partington

That Report COM 75-2005, September 5, 2005, respecting Use of Resident Interest Trust Fund for Staff Education Initiatives, be received.

That Regional Council authorize staff to utilize up to \$20,000 over the next two year period from the Resident Interest Trust Fund for staff education initiatives outlined in this report.

Carried.

143. Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Accessibility Plan

Moved by Councillor Casselman
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That Report COM 76-2005, September 12, 2005, respecting Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Accessibility Plan, be received; and

That the Accessibility Plan for 2005-2006 be adopted with additional information to be provided on the costs for the 2005-2006 Accessibility Plan.

Carried.

CORRESPONDENCE

144. Moved by Councillor Marshall
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That the following communications be received:

CSC 17-2005 John D. Maloney, M.P., Welland Riding, (August 12, 2005) respecting Refugee Protection Claims in the Niagara Region prior to the implementation of the Safe Third Country Agreement.

CSC 18-2005 Staff Direction dated April 18, 2005 – Information on how many ODSP appeals have been successfully defended.

Carried.

OTHER BUSINESS

145. Dr. Peter Davidson
Councillor Bailey acknowledged the sudden passing of Dr. Peter Davidson who, like his father before him, provided excellent medical care to the residents at The Meadows of Dorchester (formally known as Dorchester Manor) and residents of Niagara, commenting that he would be greatly missed.

ADJOURNMENT

Committee adjourned at 4:35 p.m. to meet again on Monday, October 3, 2005, at 3:00 p.m. in Committee Room 4, Regional Headquarters Building.

Jill Hildreth
Chair

Gail Reilly
Legislative Assistant

Pam Gilroy
Regional Clerk